

*Celebrate the Beginning of the
Nation's Modern Civil Rights Era*



*The Niagara Movement Centennial
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
1906-2006*



The Niagara Movement Centennial



***“One of the greatest meetings that
American Negroes ever held.”***

W.E.B. Du Bois

In 2006, the nation will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Niagara Movement’s first meeting on American soil. The members of Niagara set a new vision for the nation by challenging the doctrines of racial and gender segregation. Founded in 1905, in Ontario, Canada, the Niagara Movement was the first major civil rights organization of the 20th century.

The Niagara Movement met in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, in August of 1906, on the campus of Storer College. In the one hundred years that followed, the vision and conviction of the Niagarites redefined individual civil, political and economic rights.

The Niagara Movement laid the cornerstone of the nation’s modern civil rights era.

Sharing Our Civil Rights Heritage



Niagara Movement leaders held the 1906 meeting in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, because John Brown's 1859 raid stood as a symbol of freedom in the struggle for equality. Today, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is a key site in the National Park Service for the education and interpretation of American History from Civil War to Civil Rights.

In 2006, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park will host the centennial of the Niagara Movement. The Centennial Commemoration is an opportunity for celebration, appreciation, education and renewed commitment to the nation's civil rights values and heritage.



A Turning Point In American History

The Niagara Movement:

Created the first, modern platform for civil rights.
Cleared the way and charted a course for the NAACP in 1909.

Marked W.E.B. Du Bois' first attempt at civil rights organization.

Rejected Booker T. Washington as the spokesman for African Americans.

The Opposition:

Booker T. Washington was well-known, popular and powerful. He believed that African Americans should focus on agriculture and industrial education, stay out of politics, and not mix socially with whites. The members of Niagara disagreed strongly with Washington's beliefs. They felt that Washington's accommodationist policies undermined the struggle for equality. The Niagara Movement demanded equal enforcement of the law for all races and active political involvement at all levels of society. One of the reasons why the Niagara Movement is not well known today is that Washington used his power to limit and influence press coverage.

"...instead of meeting in secret, we met openly...and had in significance if not in numbers one of the greatest meetings that American Negroes ever held. ...and we talked some of the plainest English that had been given voice to by black men in America."

W.E.B. Du Bois

Why was the 1906 Niagara Movement meeting at Harpers Ferry important?

It was their first public meeting.

It was their first meeting in the United States.

Women became full-fledged, voting members of the organization.

Niagara Movement Centennial Commemoration

In 2006, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and its Centennial Partners will host a week-long Anniversary Commemoration from August 14th to the 20th, to celebrate and reflect on the Niagara Movement's historic first meeting on American soil.

Teachers Institute, August 14-15:

The Centennial Teachers Institute will launch the Commemoration. The educational staff of the Park and the Harpers Ferry Historical Association will create the first, national Niagara Movement Curriculum Guides to engage students in grades K-12. Institute workshops will introduce new instructional materials on the Niagara Movement to educators from the mid-Atlantic region. The Centennial Teachers Institute will be the first in a series of workshops designed to share the new curriculum with classroom teachers. Teachers Institutes will be held throughout the region beginning with the centennial launch in Harpers Ferry.

Academic Symposium, August 16-17:

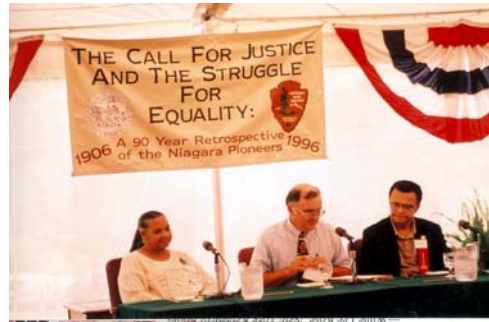
Mid-week, prominent and aspiring scholars will gather for an Academic Symposium at the Storer College campus. The public is invited to attend presentations and discussions of new research on the significance of the Niagara Movement and its meeting at Harpers Ferry. The Academic Symposium will be held in the same building where the Niagara Movement met, known today as the Stephen T. Mather Training Center of the National Park Service.

Centennial Celebration, August 18-20:

The Commemoration will culminate in a three-day Centennial Celebration. The Celebration will feature dramatic presentations, orchestral and choral performances, children's programs, storytelling, book-signings and scholarly presentations. Visitors will retrace the pilgrimage of the Niagara Movement to the 1906 site of John Brown's Fort and attend a commemorative memorial service. Throughout the Celebration participants will enjoy living history performances and tours of the former Storer College Campus and the Lower Town district of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.



Centennial Celebration



Concerts, dramatic presentations and a variety of programs will commemorate the Niagara Movement's legacy. Featured events include the debut of the *Niagara Centennial Score* composed by the renowned Dr. Frank Foster and presented by the world famous Count Basie Orchestra.

As a tribute to the vision of the Niagara Movement leaders, the program will feature a panel discussion, "*The Problem of the Twentieth Century will be the Problem of the Color Line: Breaking Barriers in America*," based on a W.E. B. Du Bois quotation. The panel will share the rich history of prominent African Americans whose lives and actions embody the nation's promise and the struggle for civil rights.

Dr. Du Bois Williams, of Xavier and the granddaughter of W.E.B. Du Bois, Dr. Lawrence Hogan, Professor of African American Studies from Union College, and two-time Pulitzer Prize winning author, Dr. David Levering Lewis, are among the prominent scholars who will share the remarkable stories of the men and women who founded the Niagara Movement. Following the Academic Symposium, Dr. Lewis will present the Saturday afternoon Keynote Address.

Dr. Richard I. McKinney, former President of Storer College and Joseph Wilder, renowned musician, will lead the pilgrimage to the 1906 site of John Brown's Fort.

Reaching America's Classrooms

Creating A National Curriculum Guide

In honor of the Centennial, the staff of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and the Harpers Ferry Historical Association will create the Niagara Movement Curriculum Guide.

The Curriculum Guide will feature K-12 grade-appropriate lesson plans and will be supported by an interactive CD-ROM, traveling trunks and an educator's website using primary documents, historic photographs, oral histories and video records.

National Park Service educators will collaborate with school teachers to develop and field-test the curriculum. A steering committee comprised of experts in local, regional and national history will support the development of the educator's guide.

Student activities will be based on state and national curriculum standards and will incorporate a variety of instructional strategies.

Development of the Niagara Movement Curriculum Guide begins this fall. The Guide will be introduced in 2006, at the Centennial Teachers Institute.

Presenting Workshops for Educators

The education staff of the Park and Association will present a series of teacher workshops to introduce the Curriculum Guide. With an expectation of reaching more than 100,000 students, the workshops will focus on introducing social studies teachers in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C., to the curriculum.

The Park education staff will also present the Curriculum Guide to National Park Service educators representing 47 sites in 21 states that share in the history of the struggle for racial and gender equality.



Niagara Movement Centennial Partners

Niagara Movement Centennial Partners include academic institutions, state agencies and nonprofit civic, educational, historical and preservation organizations. Centennial Partners are dedicated to sharing the momentous beginnings of the modern civil rights era with current and future generations.

Association for the Study of African

American Life and History

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site

Friends of Harpers Ferry

National Historical Park

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Harpers Ferry Historical Association

The Jefferson County Chapter of the NAACP

Stephen T. Mather Training Center

National Park Foundation and The African

American Experience Fund

Shepherd University

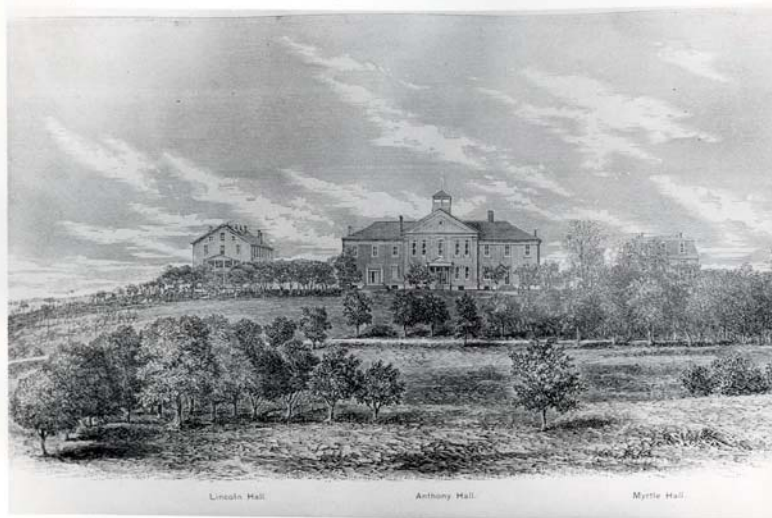
Storer College National Alumni Association

West Virginia Division of Tourism



The Niagara Movement at Harpers Ferry

*“The battle we wage is not for ourselves
alone but for all true Americans.”*
- W.E.B. Du Bois





The Cornerstone of the Modern Civil Rights Era: The 1906 Niagara Movement at Harpers Ferry

At the dawn in the twentieth century, the outlook for full civil rights for African Americans was at a precarious crossroads. Failed Reconstruction, the Supreme Court's separate but equal doctrine (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) coupled with Booker T. Washington's accommodationist policies had threatened to compromise any hope for full and equal rights under the law.


Harvard educated William Edward Burghardt Du Bois committed himself to moving beyond a calculated appeal for limited civil rights. He acted in 1905 by drafting a "Call" to a few selected persons. The Call had two purposes; "organized determination and aggressive action on the part of men who believed in Negro freedom and growth," and opposition to "present methods of strangling honest criticism."

Du Bois gathered a group of men representing every region of the country except the West. They had hoped to meet in Buffalo, New York, but were refused accommodation and had to migrate across the border to Canada. Twenty-nine men met at the Erie Beach Hotel in Ontario. A constitution and by-laws were adopted,

committees were established and the "Declaration of Principles," outlining the future for African Americans, was written. After three days they returned across the border with a renewed sense of resolve in the struggle for freedom and equality.

Thirteen months later, between August 15 and 19, 1906, the Niagara Movement held its first meeting in America on the campus of Storer College in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Harpers Ferry was symbolic for a number of reasons. First and foremost was the connection to John Brown. It was at Harpers Ferry in 1859 that Brown's raid against slavery struck a blow for freedom. Many felt it was John Brown who fired the first shot of the Civil War. By the latter part of the nineteenth century John Brown's Fort had become a shrine and a symbol of freedom to African Americans.

Harpers Ferry was also the home of Storer College. Freewill Baptists opened Storer in 1867 as a mission school to educate former slaves. For twenty-five years Storer was the only school in West Virginia that offered African Americans an education beyond the primary level.



The Niagarites, as they were called, arrived in Harpers Ferry with passion in their hearts and high hopes that their voices would be heard and action would result. They were now more than fifty strong. Women also attended this historic gathering where, on August 17, 1906, they were granted full and equal membership to the organization.

The week was filled with many inspirational speeches, meetings, special addresses and commemorative ceremonies. Max Barber, editor of *The Voice of the Negro* said, ***“A more suitable place for the meeting of the Niagara Movement than Harpers Ferry would have been hard to find. I must confess that I had never yet felt as I felt in Harpers Ferry.”***

A highlight for those gathered was John Brown’s Day. It was a day devoted to honoring the memory of John Brown. At 6:00 A.M. a silent pilgrimage began to John Brown’s Fort. The members removed their shoes and socks as they tread upon the “hallowed ground” where the fort stood. The assemblage then marched single-file around the fort singing “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “John Brown’s Body.”

The inspirational morning was followed by an equally stirring afternoon. The Niagarites listened to Henrietta Leary Evans, whose brother and nephew fought along side Brown at Harpers Ferry, then Lewis Douglass, son of Frederick Douglass, and finally Reverdy C. Ransom, pastor

of the Charles Street AME Church in Boston. Ransom’s speech on John Brown has been described as a “masterpiece.” The late black scholar, Dr. Benjamin Quarles, called the address, ***“...the most stirring single episode in the life of the Niagara Movement.”***

The conference concluded on Sunday August 19, 1906, with the reading of, “An Address to the Country,” penned by W.E.B. Du Bois. ***“We will not be satisfied to take one jot or tittle less than our full manhood rights. We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil and social; and until we get these rights we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America. The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone but for all true Americans.”***

With thunderous applause, the Harpers Ferry conference drew to a close. Years later recalling this conference Du Bois referred to it as ***“...one of the greatest meetings that American Negroes ever held.”***

The Niagara Movement laid the cornerstone of the modern civil rights movement. A new movement found a voice. The organization continued until 1911 when almost all of its members became the backbone of the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). There, the men and women of the Niagara Movement recommitted themselves to the ongoing call for justice and the struggle for equality.

Preserving America's Heritage



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